

WALL STREET JOURNAL  
5 March 1987ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 29

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## Letters to the Editor

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### *SALT Ceilings Serve U.S. Interests*

Your Feb. 3 editorial "Is SALT Harmful?" misses the point of legislation we recently introduced in the Senate. You argue that we believe "it will all work out fine if the U.S. unilaterally conforms to the restraints of a nuclear treaty negotiated by Jimmy Carter." In fact, our legislation requires U.S. adherence to a particular part of SALT II, the numerical limitations on offensive nuclear weapons, and only so long as the Soviet Union continues to respect those limitations.

There is overwhelming evidence that this is in the national-security interests of the U.S. President Reagan and members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff recognized this fact during the five-and-one-half years that the U.S. stayed with the limits. In June 1985, President Reagan said, "Despite the Soviet record over the past years, it remains in our interest to establish an interim framework of truly mutual restraint as we pursue . . . the ongoing negotiations in Geneva." Both the president and the chiefs concluded that, given Soviet advantages in a world without SALT, the U.S. was more secure with the limits than without them. Nothing has changed, and the policy of interim restraint is still the best one.

To stay under the SALT ceilings, the U.S.S.R. has been forced to dismantle 556 operational missile launchers, while the U.S. has dismantled only 48. As the deputy director of the CIA, Robert Gates, testified in 1985, without continued adherence to the SALT II numerical limits on multiple-warhead launchers the Soviets are well-positioned to begin adding thousands of warheads to their arsenal.

The Congressional Research Service estimates that, without the numerical limits, by 1995 the Soviets could deploy about 5,000 more strategic warheads than could the U.S. The Soviets can create this new "window of vulnerability" for us because they possess many more "hot" arms-production lines than the U.S.

Furthermore, Soviet military planners do not have to contend with public pressure to keep down defense spending.

We believe there should be an appropriate U.S. response to Soviet violations of other aspects of SALT II, such as the deployment of the Midgetman missile in response to the Soviet SS-25. Unilateral scrapping of the limits by the U.S., however, only undermines our security by playing to Soviet strength—their ability to mount an offensive-weapons buildup.

There is no doubt that SALT II as a whole needs to be replaced by a more effective agreement. But its central numerical ceilings—the only existing, effective limits on an offensive nuclear-arms race between the superpowers—have prevented the Soviets from adding to their totals of land- and sea-based strategic missiles. It is no wonder that the president's former strategic-weapons adviser, six former secretaries of defense (three Republicans and three Democrats) and all our NATO allies support staying within the SALT limits.

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